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The Value of Extra-Curricular Activities to an Engineering Student

Editor's note: The following paper, submitted as one of the requirements for initiation into Tau Beta Pi, was judged the best one of 40 during the Winter Quarter initiation.

Not many years ago an engineer might have gone far in his profession on the strength of his technical knowledge alone. The present very essential attribute of culture was then of no relative importance. But today conditions are reversed. One's manners, dress, and knowledge other than technical are prime factors in a successful career. Now, the graduate engineer, like the graduate in every other college meets a world in which competition has become so close that technical knowledge alone will carry him but a short way on the road to success. There are too many others who have equal knowledge and skill. Frequently the selection of a man for a job or an advancement in rank turns upon some quality entirely removed from the candidate's ability in the field in question.

How is the student in engineering to acquire such qualities in four years at the university? Little in the course itself offers any opportunity for such development. But the engineer may have in common with every other student such training if he will engage in certain of the extra-curricular activities offered by his school.

Membership in clubs of various kinds, active participation in societies and organizations, and attendance at lectures will all give the engineer confidence in his ability to express his ideas correctly and effectively in conversation and in public speaking. The majority of student engineers are not so unusually gifted in the art of public speaking that they cannot be materially aided by "outside" activities.

More and more the engineer is becoming a man of affairs whose opinion is sought on many subjects and who is expected to have a broad knowledge covering many subjects. Fortunate is the man who has during his years at college taken time to broaden his education through extra-curricular activities.

Athletics offer excellent opportunities to the participant. While all cannot be so fortunate as to make "varsity" teams, everyone may engage in some way in the athletic life of his school and thereby broaden his interests and sympathies.

What has been said of athletics may be said of music or of participation in any other school activity. Each offers opportunity for making new contacts with persons of varied interests and of acquiring culture and of becoming versatile.

Specialization is important today but also is broad general knowledge essential. Engineering courses give the former; extra-curricular activities, the latter.—C. L. G.